

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 26, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Speaker Pelosi:

Thank you for your continued leadership to ensure a robust Build Back Better Act is passed and enacted for the well-being of all Americans, especially vulnerable seniors and people with long term disabilities. As Congress negotiates the final Build Back Better package, we request you to prioritize the inclusion of expanding Medicare coverage to include dental, vision, and hearing benefits.

Expanding Medicare has support from overwhelming bipartisan majorities of the American people. A recent poll found that 84 percent of the participants, including more than three-quarters of Republicans, support expanding Medicare benefit coverage to include dental, hearing, and vision.¹

As you are aware, Medicare today does not cover dental, vision, or hearing services, with very limited exceptions.² Because few people have supplemental insurance covering these additional services, among people who received care, 75 percent of their costs of dental and hearing services and 60 percent of their costs of vision services were paid out of pocket. On average, annual out-of-pocket spending was \$914 for hearing care, \$874 for dental care, and \$230 for vision care.³ As a result, among Medicare beneficiaries, 75 percent of people who needed a hearing aid did not have one; 70 percent of people who had trouble eating because of their teeth did not go to the dentist in the past year; and 43 percent of people who had trouble seeing did not have an eye exam in the past year.

¹ Sanger-Katz, M. (2021, September 20). *Five Decades Later, Medicare Might Cover Dental Care*. Retrieved from The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/29/upshot/medicare-dental-care.html>

² Willink, A., Schoen, C., & Davis, K. (2018, January 18). *How Medicare Could Provide Dental, Vision, and Hearing Care for Beneficiaries*. Retrieved from The Commonwealth Fund: <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/issue-briefs/2018/jan/how-medicare-could-provide-dental-vision-and-hearing-care>

³ Lee, C. (2021, September 21). *Many Medicare Beneficiaries Face High Out-Of-Pocket Costs for Dental and Hearing Care, Whether in Traditional Medicare or Medicare Advantage*. Retrieved from Kaiser Family Foundation: <https://www.kff.org/health-costs/press-release/many-medicare-beneficiaries-face-high-out-of-pocket-costs-for-dental-and-hearing-care-whether-in-traditional-medicare-or-medicare-advantage/>

Neglecting dental, vision and hearing issues often has a cascading effect on one's physical, psychological, and emotional health—making it even more critical that we ensure all Medicare beneficiaries have affordable access to these vital health services.

- Dental problems, and their accompanying inflammation and bacteria, can worsen other chronic conditions, like diabetes and heart disease. Additionally, missing or sore teeth can make it hard to eat a healthy diet and frequently leads to malnutrition.⁴
- Hearing loss increases the risk of dementia, fall, and depression and may increase social isolation and reduce cognitive function.⁵
- Poor vision is associated with an increased risk of falls, depression, cognitive impairment, hospitalization, and limited mobility.⁶

Ensuring that older adults and people with long-term disability or end-stage renal disease have dental, hearing, and vision benefits has long been a priority for Congress. These services were included in H.R. 3 that passed the House of Representatives in the 116th Congress, and we need to deliver on this promise.

We now have an opportunity to ensure the expansion of Medicare in the Build Back Better Act—guaranteeing health care for millions of older adults and people with disabilities. Therefore, we encourage you to maintain the expansion and improvement of Medicare in the Build Back Better Act. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Sean Casten
Member of Congress

/s/
Cindy Axne
Member of Congress

/s/
Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

⁴ Gleckman, H. (2021, July 22). *Adding Dental, Vision, and Hearing to Traditional Medicare Would Be Expensive, But Important*. Retrieved from Forbes: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/howardgleckman/2021/07/22/adding-dental-vision-and-hearing-to-traditional-medicare-would-be-expensive-but-important/?sh=3bf78ef05701>

⁵ Center for Medicare Advocacy. (n.d.). *Medicare Coverage of Hearing Care and Audiology Services*. Retrieved from Center for Medicare Advocacy: <https://medicareadvocacy.org/medicare-info/medicare-coverage-of-hearing-care-and-audiology-services/>

⁶ Katch, H., & Van de Water, P. (2020, December 8). *Medicaid and Medicare Enrollees Need Dental, Vision, and Hearing Benefits*. Retrieved from Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: https://www.cbpp.org/research/health/medicaid-and-medicare-enrollees-need-dental-vision-and-hearing-benefits#_ftn28

/s/
Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress

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Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress

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James Langevin
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Doris Matsui
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Adam B. Schiff
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Ruben Gallego
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